





BT 304 .K46 1929  
Kirkland, Winifred  
Margarettta, 1872-  
The great conjecture









THE GREAT CONJECTURE  
WHO IS THIS JESUS?





LIBRARY OF PRINCETON  
JAN 29 1930  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# THE GREAT CONJECTURE

WHO IS THIS JESUS?

BY  
WINIFRED KIRKLAND



NEW YORK  
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

**COPYRIGHT, 1929,  
BY  
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY, INC.**

**PRINTED IN THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to thank *The Century Magazine* and *The Christian Century* for permission to reprint material used in this book.



## CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE JESUS OF HISTORY . . . .	3
II.	THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE . . . .	33
III.	THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE . . . .	61
IV.	THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION .	105



## THE JESUS OF HISTORY



## CHAPTER I

**I**BELIEVE there is no one in the world today so alive as Jesus of Nazareth. As a thinking woman, my first impulse is hot resentment that the fashionable literature of the period coolly assumes that intelligence and observation and education are the unquestioned prerogatives of the agnostic, and superstition the distinguishing characteristic of the Christian. But my resentment at the imputation fades to uttermost humility when I realize who is responsible for this too prevalent opinion. If Christians had ever been brave enough to make Christ alive, nobody would now be saying that Christianity is dead.

Yet to any one who in spite of the murky bewilderment of this day, dares to surmise a dawn, those superficial observers of their own time who dismiss Christianity as obsolete, appear like the drowsy soldiers once set to watch a tomb. Pilate's guard was too complacent

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

to guess that from this tomb there was even at that moment issuing a spirit destined to remake the decadent Roman world. Throughout history the spirit of Jesus has never been more alive than when people thought it buried. It is my conviction that Christian faith today is more thoughtfully intrepid, more logically, rather than emotionally, adventurous, than ever before. But in what I am about to write I am not trying to defend my faith to any one, I am humbly trying to explain it to myself. I am not addressing any materialist to whom Jesus is a myth or a legend, and far less am I addressing any Christian to whom Jesus is a dogma or a ritual; I am writing of the Jesus that I see, for others who with me perceive a man too alive for any labels. I could not set out on a personal record if I felt it to be merely personal, but I believe myself to be speaking for many in this momentous decade, when I say that for me, Jesus of Galilee is the most living fact of the present, the burning, never-to-be-answered Enigma of every day. Always he is there, standing by my window in the barred

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

light of each new morning, a young Jewish rabbi, vital as if he had drunk the sunrise, ironic as he gazes at my little life, or glances beyond the pane at the big world's petty self-importance. Unfailing irony of mind he possesses, this Jesus that I see, and that up-bubbling humor which has ever been in him the flowering expression of a transcendent sanity. At moments he flashes from genial raillery to wistful challenge, evoking some secret aspiration with a confidence in my hesitant capacities that is beyond human understanding. His sympathy is instant, steadfast, fathomless. His aspect has each day something new, provocative, inviting me to fresh adventure of his mystery.

But I admit that I did not choose this Presence. Slowly, steadily, it has grown ever more real, more cogent, from childhood, through youth, through maturity, until today Jesus of Nazareth stands forth for me, literally, as the realest fact in the universe. To many a thoughtful man and woman there is something strangely new about this Christ of today, a Christ for us no longer reducible

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

to the tenets of any creed or to the prescribed emotions of any liturgy. When we Christians attempt to explain the marvel of an invisible personage moving beside us, or when we try to analyze our relation to this phenomenon, we may be observed to use often the same expressions, almost identical in form, yet not the terms of any familiar ritual, but our own words, alive and immediate. As passing instance of this striking but unconscious similarity of phrase, is this brief quotation from a book by Lord Charnwood. I came upon it a few days after writing the above paragraph:

“Moreover, if it be the result of these studies to bring us into a presence which to the normal mind is dear and awful and strangely near, the result is a fact of science, to be reported and reckoned with as such.”

Of course this sense of the actuality of Jesus beside us is the result of imagination, but I fail to see how that fact in any way invalidates that actuality. The evidence of my material eyes seems to me neither more nor less fallible than the evidence of my imma-

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

terial imagination. I cannot see any intrinsic logic in accepting the evidence of my eyes employed to see a physical person, and denying the evidence of my imagination employed to see a spiritual person. For myself I know no more stimulating use of the imagination than the visualizing of Jesus, because the effect is amazingly different from a like attempt to summon forth any other dead man from out the past. Suppose I try to fancy myself as having for companion at every hour some man of great religion, like Buddha, or of great humanity like Lincoln, or of great friendliness and charm, like Charles Lamb, what is the result? An almost instant feeling of constriction, of excessive impact, a realization of petty flaws in the character, a critical attitude of mind of which I am ashamed, but which I cannot escape. Then by contrast I imagine Jesus of Nazareth opening the door and giving me his hand. There is instant enfranchisement, a sense of self-expansion. Something incalculably liberating and enlarging there is in this Presence called Jesus. There is no irritation of impact when he enters the room, instead one feels walls and ceiling stretch and

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

lift to fit the larger self he calls forth. The imagination cannot evoke from history any man or woman whose constant presence will not in the end either dwarf or irritate. In final test, the effort thus to resurrect the dead for hourly, present contact will weary one, and be abandoned as laborious and absurd. But the endeavor to make Jesus actual has the strikingly different effect that, for any one adventurous enough to make a spiritual experiment, he becomes the most stimulating, the most creative comrade any man can have.

But I repeat that I did not choose this Presence in my life. In many ways existence would be easier without it. If it were not for that incessant, ironic comment in my ear it would be a simple matter to accept herd opinion, either religious or secular. Does that Presence make for quiet in the soul or disquiet? One thing only I know, Jesus is for me an unavoidable and constant challenge. He is a comrade terrifying in demands. I doubt my strength to follow where he may lead. Unchosen and in sober literalness, Jesus of Galilee has become the beckoning adven-

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

ture of all my thinking. My days jog to the usual commonplace. I am, like every one else, deep in other people's concerns, deep in my own, but always I listen and I speak and act to a strange undertone of question, What is God, and who is Jesus?

There is today significance in the fact that many an unexpected person is writing a life of Jesus. I once thought of writing another such biography, but I perceived that the Jesus whom I see could never be thus confined. I do not know him well enough to write his life and never shall. I wonder whether the intelligentsia of today realize that in their own ranks are some who see Jesus in startling vividness, for it is Ezra Pound, in one of the great religious poems of English literature, who voices my thought that Jesus cannot be compressed into any written biography.

“They’ll no’ get him a’ in a book, I think,  
Though they write it cunningly.  
No mouse o’ the scrolls was the Goodly Fere,  
But aye loved the open sea.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “The Goodly Fere” from *Personæ: Collected Poems*, by Ezra Pound: Horace Liveright.

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

It is inevitable that in the very effort to describe the figure most familiar to me, a portrait of Jesus should become to some extent a portrait of the person who is speaking. But nothing is further from my aim than self-delineation. May no more of myself affect my words than is needed to vivify Jesus. Throughout the two thousand years of his history, the Galilean has submitted to only one method of portraiture, and to that method this discussion is humbly obedient. We do not so much as begin to apprehend Jesus until we recognize the import for each one of us of Jesus' unvarying principle of disclosure. The law of revelation that Jesus selects is not what we unthinkingly call supernatural. Supernatural is an evasive and facile word. To term Jesus' manner of revelation supernatural is to evade the profound responsibility of each one of us to reveal him. Throughout the twenty centuries of his existence Jesus has chosen to be known as a person solely by his effect on other persons. No one can know anything of that Presence at my side except as my hands imitate his, and my face mirrors

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

his, and my thoughts and words express his. Every Christian becomes a biographer of Jesus, revealing the impress of a dynamic personality upon his own as authentically as Matthew and Luke, Mark and John reported what they saw and knew. Because of Jesus' own chosen law of revelation, the reader of these words will necessarily view him from the angle of the writer's own individuality. But, may this humble account of today's Galilean share one characteristic with those four sublime biographies of old; may the personality of the author be forgotten in the portrait.

The religious journals of earlier times were written in cloistered quiet, and so could become leisurely and expansive, but even the concept of a cloistered quiet is alien to the spirit of our day. We countenance no Jesus who requires an aloofness from our fellows. Any one of us who would be even the humblest diarist of God must find solitude only within his own mind, must attain an ever-menaced peace of soul within himself, amid the rush and confusion and seethe of modern life. Yet perhaps these, our personal glimpses

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

of God today, are the more vital for being constantly threatened, are the more valued for being fought for. Curious that Jesus should ever be conceived as needing any form of cloister. No life in history gives a more vivid sense of the suffocating pressure of crowds. It is strange that when Jesus had no time to eat, no time to sleep, he still wrenched for himself long hours for solitary prayer. Why? If I could ever find the answer to that question, it might shed some flicker of light on those two supreme mysteries, What is God, and who is Jesus?

Nothing is more difficult than to submit a living friend to any form of analysis, and yet this is what I am now attempting to do for that living Man who stands at this moment looking into my eyes as I write. This Presence has not always been for me vivid and compelling as now; whence then, and how, did it come to be so? Out of what material of history and scripture and observation has Jesus shaped himself to my sight? And second, by what method have I been led to dis-

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

cover him, and how shall I perfect that method so that I may follow him ever more confidently down the blind, advancing future? When I have studied both the material and the method, what conclusions shall I formulate, what appraisement shall I make of the Galilean, as revealed today? Asking no one to agree with me, but rather having respect for any contrary opinion provided only it shall be honest in its logic and tolerant in its expression, what answer shall I make for myself to that supreme question, Who is Jesus?

As I examine Jesus in history, this is what I see. Looking back two thousand years, I focus on that ancient world, rimming with a bright and narrow border the jagged oblong of the Mediterranean sea. It is a world which, like our own, functions with a deceptive efficiency. Roman roads run firm and broad. Roman soldiers clang indomitable across the bleeding provinces. Rome is too proud and too prosperous to know she is starving to death. In the blackness beyond that bright Mediterranean borderland, buried civilizations are rotting and unborn civiliza-

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

tions are shoving their upward way along seed paths. It is a world still mighty, but inwardly corrupt with dead illusions, for Plato and Pericles with their hopes are dead beyond any returning, Brutus and Virgil are dead, and Elijah and David are dead, and everywhere the gods are dead, undone in their very temples by the cynical, gold-bought legions of Rome. As I look back on it, it always seems to me the weariest world that all history can show.

Upon this scene of mocking, hidden despair there abruptly flashes an enigmatic character. The historian sees him suddenly flaming on a dim little hillside in the most obscure corner of all the empire. Apparently he is merely a young Jewish carpenter uneducated and rustic but possessed of some strange dominance and personal charm. Unnoticed he lives some thirty years, a villager, an artisan; then in one moment he flings away his saw and plane, and goes forth at some mysterious call. He becomes an itinerant faith-healer and street-preacher. In both healing and preaching he seems to have possessed a headlong force that

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

infuriated the hypocritical priesthood of his day. After two or three years of plotting, the sycophant priests persuaded the Roman rulers to execute him as a radical and a demagogue. Even the Roman governor admitted the injustice of the charges and the illegality of the trial, for this Jesus broke no law of his country and forbade his followers to do so. In fact one of the most puzzling things about him is his power of creative conservatism.

According to all historic precedent, the gallows should have been the end of the man, but it wasn't. He had had a motley following made up of the outcast and ignorant members of society, a riffraff following chiefly, affectionate but volatile and craven. All ran away at his arrest, and continued in concealment after his death. Then a curious thing occurred. Within six weeks of his execution, these same cowardly disciples rushed out of hiding, and into the hostile streets of Jerusalem, and began to preach incredible things. But it was their own incredible transformation that made people listen to their announcements. From here and there all over

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

the countryside his followers turned up announcing that they had seen their leader alive. They said an unseen Presence walked beside them, revealing the meaning of a teaching they had not understood in his lifetime, that the practice of this teaching would achieve the remaking of all existence. They asserted that the only way for any one to live bravely was to imagine this dead master of theirs still alive and walking beside him, and that any man submitting his thoughts and actions to this unseen Person would himself be changed into a new incalculable personality. For this harmless philosophy the followers of Jesus were martyred by the hundreds, but in spite of all the efforts of church and state, there now trudged to and fro along the proud highways of Rome, in the humble guise of a Hebrew Carpenter, an invisible Conqueror not to be withstood.

This is the gist of the first chapter of Jesus in human history. But it does not belong only to the past. There has never been a chapter in the story of Jesus that could not be seen as contemporary. The facts that his disciples

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

asserted in the first six weeks after his death, are the same facts his disciples are asserting today.

The second chapter in the history of Jesus is the story of his church, a chapter not completed. When governor and priest discovered that Jesus was too great for them to kill, instead of killing they appropriated him. The chronicle of Jesus is the chronicle of successive burials. In the first centuries so-called Christian, there occurred a portentous entombment. Over the splendid young manhood of Jesus old Judaism poured all its ancient conceptions of sacrifice and propitiation until even today people sing and think of Jesus in the aspect of a blood-wet victim, rather than in the aspect of an indomitable Man. And all the power and pomp of the state closed over Jesus, and as head of a hierarchy inherited from dead emperors, the toil-stained Carpenter of Nazareth was set upon a towering altar and crowned potentate of Rome. And into the new religion came creeping the mystery cults of old Greece, which had

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

preferred sensation to action, and they too sought to incorporate Jesus, the dynamic, into their soporific creeds. Out of this blending of a threefold past was wrought the church called Christ's. But the chronicle of Jesus is the chronicle of successive resurrections, and no one of them is so resplendent as his resurrection today, for as never before he has now put from him the grave-clothes of dogma and ritual and of sterile emotion, so that we of today are looking at him in his austere and simple manhood. Today we perceive him so clearly that we can see him stand gazing at that imaged victim, and protesting, "But I gave my blood that you might call the unknown, Father." We can see him stand at the door of a cathedral, a humble workman in a laborer's jeans with a kit of tools across his shoulders, looking in at that crowned figure on the altar, and asking, "How have men so failed to see my kingliness that they should have made me a king?" To uplifted, kneeling ecstasy we can hear him say, "I did indeed bid you remember my presence with you when you share food and drink, but does the touch of

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

my cup strengthen your lips to speak my code when you are alone with the proud, does my body, broken, embolden you to share bread with the stunted child-laborers of your prosperous country?"

Today Jesus is risen and he is speaking to his church, but not solely in reproach, for Jesus is just. Far more just than many of us who today stand outside and judge church and churches, and fail to see that but for them we should never have heard of Jesus. Although, human and fearful of his requirements, the church called Christian has repeatedly buried Jesus, still it is the church that has preserved and transmitted him. Fraught with long authority out of old Judea and old Rome and old Greece, the church has been the custodian throughout history of the secret ark of Jehovah. But today in a parting of the ways there stands before the church of God a new Christ, a Carpenter indomitable in resurrection. Shall the church rise now and follow him in his adventure, or once again shall it join with Pilate and Caiaphas and Judas and bury him?

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

As I seek to trace the actual material out of which Jesus has fashioned himself for my eyes, next to those aspects of him that the history of the world and the history of the church have transmitted to me, I see those four small strange books we call the Gospels. Really they are only four fragmentary little pamphlets written in a provincial Greek most imperfectly reproducing the rugged, lowly Aramaic which Jesus and his associates actually employed. Mutilated, erased, imperfect, submitted to the hazard of fragile papyrus and of a copyist's blind fingers, and furthermore, written hurriedly to fit an immediate need, four tiny documents, all together not so long as a single copy of any popular weekly, these four insignificant little manuscripts mysteriously preserved out of the first century, are the rude casket from which issues a character dominant in the world's thinking for two thousand years. I use the word dominant advisedly. I mean that Jesus has always been a touchstone character, so that even today the greatest illumination you can have upon any man will lie in his answer to the question,

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

Who is Jesus? You will attain even greater illumination upon any person's secret philosophy if you discover this to be a question he has never faced. The Galilean is never negligible. Steadfastly he dogs one's thinking until sooner or later every man and nation must either explain Jesus or explain him away. Why is he still here, still challenging?

Perhaps there has been no more successful method of keeping Jesus buried in his scripture casket than ignorance of the actual gospel narrative, and an uncritical approach to it. Those piecemeal portions dealt to many of us as children in golden text or Sunday-school lesson are often taken by us as adults for knowledge. When I have tried to empty my own mind of all obscuring half-acquaintance with the New Testament and to read it as if it were some unknown document freshly discovered in some buried library, I have found myself amazed as I looked into a black past suddenly aglow with a procession of deathless pictures. If we had never seen Jesus wrought into stained glass or tapestry, had never heard

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

him preached from a hundred pulpits, had never read him contorted into dogma, would not the gospel pictures shake us from head to foot—Jesus announcing his Messiahship to a coarse woman by a wellside against a background of holy mountain and whitening meadows; Jesus daring to send a clarion call into a black tomb, “Lazarus, come forth!”; Jesus standing alone and bound before the vice-regent of Rome, and answering the governor’s question, “Art thou King of the Jews?” with his level-eyed “Yes”? For myself I cannot read John with the same critical acumen with which I read Juvenal, without seeing the darkling present suddenly pierced by shining paths. If we had never heard his words before, would we not stand aghast that any man should conceive of saying, “I am Light”; “I am truth”; “I am water for those athirst”; “I am bread for those famishing”? For myself, when I have tried to approach Jesus as courteously as I would approach Napoleon or Plato, I find his words crying to my brain with an insistence that does not speak to me in any other dead man’s voice.

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

The present world is vast, and teems with discoveries and inventions that every day make it seem vaster. No one of us can keep abreast of the announcements that research makes in every morning's head-lines. Yet every one of us struggles to have a passing knowledge of what science and literature and history are constantly bringing to light. In the effort to know, even most superficially, what is going on about me, I have been most deeply impressed by the present revelations of Biblical study, and by the type of men devoting brain and soul to these investigations. Such men as Streeter, or Glover, or Good-speed, to mention only three of many great and greater, are to me not to be disregarded as students and discoverers. In forming my own estimate of the Galilean, I am forced to take into account the trend of present-day Biblical research to put the gospel narratives far nearer to the events they chronicle than widespread popular opinion puts them. In my own effort toward critical integrity, to dismiss the Gospels as accretions of folklore and legend would be an evasion so ready and easy

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

that I could not, with self-respect, commit it. Both from internal and external evidence it would appear that all the essential facts of Jesus' life and doctrine were being preached to hostile audiences within two months of his execution. To my own mind, there is no real difference between what Simon Peter said at Pentecost and what Harry Emerson Fosdick is saying today.

The Gospels impress me because they don't try to. They are addressed by men convinced to other men convinced. Matthew and Mark, Luke and John, never dreamed of converting you and me. We moderns are mere eaves-droppers, and I have tried to let that large and pregnant fact sink deep into my thinking. I myself have found it impossible to undervalue the verbal memories of Jesus' disciples, for it is a fact that before the invention of printing, verbal memory was most conscientiously cultivated. Every man in Jesus' company had been trained in synagogue schools to listen and repeat long passages by heart. That modern ears have atrophied does not mean that Peter and James and John were

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

thus handicapped. Without any break in transmission, without any time for legend, all those incidents and all those words of Jesus which have revolutionized thought, were current within a year of his earthly life. For some thirty to forty years Jesus was given to the world by word of mouth. Not until eyewitnesses began to die was he intrusted to papyrus. But even so, the three synoptic Gospels, according to the best scholarly evidence that a mere layman can arrive at, appear to have been in active use, and not only that, they had been passed upon by eyewitnesses as the best of all the various lives of Jesus then in existence—before the year 80 A.D. This is only some thirty to forty years after his death. As I steadily try to discover for myself the foundations of my faith, it seems to me that if I were to doubt the accounts of Jesus as lightly as is often done, there is hardly a character in history that would remain to me. But of course it is safe enough for us to exhume other characters from their records. We are not afraid of them.

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

That the Gospels are conscious fabrication is something I have never been able to consider, for if four men meant to lie why didn't they do it better? Fabrication would never have permitted such glaring discrepancies to stand. To me not the inconsistencies of the Gospels but their consistency is the incredible thing. The fourfold singleness of the narrative is unique in literature, and perhaps was possible only in that ancient century and in that ancient land. It is both our advantage and our danger that we of today are subtle and sophisticated and meticulous in artistry. Jesus' transmission was given to men simple and ignorant and crude and receptive as little children. Four humble and illiterate men still shaken by an amazing contact tried to describe the effect an utterly unprecedented character had upon his contemporaries. Could four modern men have so forgotten themselves and their art that their four narratives should present one variegated but harmonious portrait? I am writing of that man who slowly through the years has become more alive to me than any other human being, and

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

I am humbly trying to discover whence he has become for me so real, and I find that one of the greatest influences upon my faith is my conviction that the biography of Jesus of Nazareth was intrusted to the only era and to the only mentality capable of transmitting him as one splendid and consistent whole.

Today the greatest single deterrent to knowledge of Jesus is his familiarity. Because we think we know him, we pass him by. The greatest challenge to his followers is to know Jesus first for ourselves and then to present him to others, clean and new and living, from out the grave-mold of familiarity. We think we know some hillside too near to allure us, but we have never seen the view from its summit, we have never listened to its bird-calls on a June dawn, and far less have we ever sought to penetrate either as botanists or as painters the miracle implicit in a single blossom of its bobbing clover. We might spend a lifetime in study of that neighboring hill, and in the end recognize ourselves as still grotesquely ignorant before its mys-

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

teries of indomitable springtide forever new. We who would see Jesus are trying to look at him as he really is, not as too much current opinion views him. Scholarship is every day bringing to us new and startling facts. Nazareth was no isolated hill-town, it was the busy suburb of the great metropolis of Sepphoris. If Jesus' manner of life and manner of speech appear rustic, it was because he chose to have them so. We think of Jesus as not knowing the culture of old Greece and Rome, in our absurdity of ignorance we even conceive ourselves as better informed than he in regard to those now buried civilizations then alive all about him. We have read of Greece, but Jesus knew Greeks as door-step neighbors. We have read of old Judea and old Egypt, but every day Jesus could actually observe the caravans that linked the alien cultures of farthest East and farthest West. We read of Roman manners and customs, but Jesus had the opportunity to walk the mosaic of a Roman bath, or sit with the spectators in an amphitheater. As Fosdick tells us, he delivered a solemn trust to his apostles not in the

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

congenial Hebrew background we conceive as setting, but in the actual shadow of a temple to the Greek Pan and of another, towering high and recent, to the God-emperor Augustus then still alive.

Jesus knew only old Palestine we are told; yes, but what a Palestine! Throbbing and crowded and buzzing with commerce, netted with Roman roads that mock at modern engineering, gleaming with Herod's new-built Roman temples. There was no period of history, there was no spot in all the world that could have presented to the mind such complexity of thought, such variety of races and of activities and tendencies. If Jesus remained a villager, it was by conviction, for necessarily his whole philosophy of life must have been evolved in incessant contact with a diversity of culture and custom such as we moderns in our ignorance cannot even conceive. But not merely his historic environment throws new light on that Jesus we think familiar. There are facts of child-psychology which are strangely illuminating. Jesus' first knowledge of crucifixion came to him as a

## THE JESUS OF HISTORY

sensitive small boy when the rebellion at near-by Sepphoris was punished by the crucifying of thousands. Did Jesus see those crosses? Did he actually know some of the men who hung upon them? If so, does this fact throw no new light on the bravery with which later he steadfastly set his face toward Jerusalem?

I look back at history, so-called secular and so-called sacred, and there I see Jesus emerging from grave after grave, ever more radiant. I read the four tiny biographies of him, and each time to me, a thinking and critical woman, their fourfold story seems more difficult to account for. I look back at ancient Palestine in the light of the research that is going on in this very month and hour, and then I look around me at modern New York in all its strangeness of the new and the usual, and in and out, in and out of all the streets of the world, I see thridding his steadfast way, always familiar yet always to be discovered, the inescapable Galilean.

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE



## CHAPTER II

**I**T happens that I do not make a daily practice of reading the written life of Jesus, probably because it is the unwritten life of Jesus that more and more interests me. Out of the Gospels he came to me, but he has grown too great for me to put him back. It is as if he himself had rolled away the stone, and out of his obscure tomb, those Gospels before which I stood reverent and waiting, he had appeared with his eternal Easter challenge of life to death. But I cannot put the living Jesus that I know back into his tomb, although I may from time to time enter that broken and imperfect chronicle to contemplate the divine gesture which imperiously flung away the grave-clothes and with august finality folded the napkin once constricting the radiance of his face.

I believe that my own experience of Jesus in relation to the New Testament is perhaps typical of his method of revelation for all

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

humanity and for all history; that is, we receive from the Gospels the first flickering hypothesis of a divine man who suggests a divine intention for all life. But until we ourselves have made trial of that hypothesis, neither that divine man nor that divine intention obtains any reality. I mean these words most literally. God does not just happen, in vulgar cheapness, unsought for, unfought for. For His discovery, God requires a curious and most reluctant key, an adventurous humility. I believe an adventurous humility is the key to all human achievement. At this moment the greatest current achievement of the human race is in science. The reason is that science employs this fundamental psychological law of all progress, a convinced humility. Science sets forth on its quest with no more self-conceit than a two-year-old possesses who toddles forth alone from his bed into some black mystery of midnight hall and stair, forbidden door and open sky. "Except ye become as little children,"—trite words, but the man who once used them is a scientist, a scientist of the soul. Today it is scientists who

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

set the example of humility and bravery, while Christians are still enfeebled by complacence and caution. Science but reiterates the pricelessness of the method Jesus has always demanded. Just so long as science remains humble, its gifts to the race are beyond computing; just so soon as it ceases to be humble it ceases to be scientific. Science abrogates the very essential of its advance the moment it becomes pontifical, the moment it abjures that reverence before the unknown revealing every honest laboratory as a holy place, and declares there are no realms for exploration except those it has staked for discovery. Christianity and science have at present a vital interrelation, if each could only be modest enough to accept light from the other. Science is the study of the creation, religion is the study of the creator, but the technique of these two studies is identical, for the key to all human advance is an intrepid humility.

Jesus issuing from his scripture tomb in history can be observed inviting every follower to a hazard essentially scientific. In those dim, earliest reaches of Christian story, he can

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

be seen first only as a flickering shape, his very form conditioned to the mind of the observer—gardener, wayfarer, fisherman—precisely as today I myself conceive his essential character to be that of a Friend, stimulating beyond conception. But my method of discovering Jesus I regard as fundamentally scientific since it is the putting to proof of an hypothesis. Out from a crude first century tomb issues a man who says:

“I have the secret of life. Come live with me and see if I am true. It is the law of my reality that you cannot know me by looking at me. You cannot know me except by the scientific adventure of an hypothesis. This hypothesis of my reality, like every hypothesis of science, is first conceived in the imagination, and then established by bold experiment. First conceive me, the actual Jesus two thousand years dead, as a living though invisible man beside you, and second make the blind attempt to guide your thoughts and conduct as if I, this actual historic Jesus, were speaking in your ear, and thus by following the inalien-

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

able law both of scientific and of religious discovery, you shall discover God."

This is Jesus' announcement to me from his scripture tomb. And this is why, the more I come to know him as an ever-enlarging fact and personality, the less I can ever again confine him within his written biographies. In fact it is the Jesus I have come to know outside of the Gospels who now goes back with me into those narrow sacred precincts once conscribing him and makes those early words shine with the glory of two thousand later Easters.

I believe that the sequence of Christ-experience is as true for Christianity—word pitifully defiled both by its adherents and its opponents!—as it is true for the individual Christian. First the flickering hypothesis of a divine man as challenging Example to all the race, then the laboratory experiment of imitation, leading to the only sort of assurance we shall ever have that God is a reality. Christianity has long compromised with the

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

example of Jesus, accepting it in some things, utterly repudiating it in others, and thus attaining only an imperfect knowledge of God and, as relentless consequence, exhibiting in its practices only an imperfect imitation of God's purposes. But today Christianity is not dead. It is waking to the inexorable need of new and bold alignments. The laboratory testing of Jesus in conduct is becoming matter for the public as well as for the private Christian conscience. But both Christianity at large and each Christian in particular must remember that the discovery of God resembles the discoveries of science in this,—God is invalidated the instant we proclaim to ourselves that our discovery is final. The essence of pharisaism is the fallacy of a God finite enough to be casketed in a creed. The tragedy of pharisaism is that it is perennial, the tragedy of Calvary is that it is recurrent. It is possible for even science to descend to a pharisaism as destructive as the pharisaism of religion. The moment psychology asserts that behaviorism or any other *ism* or *logy* is its final word, psychology itself is building a wall

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

against all further investigation of the laws of human conduct. And the instant I say of the Presence beside me at this moment, "This and this only, is the God you, my agnostic friend, must receive," or far more perilously, the instant I announce, "This is the perfected conception of Christ that I myself shall always accept," in that instant I am building a wall between myself and an ever-expanding God, who if He be God at all, must ever both satisfy and elude my finite aspiration.

It is witness to mankind's unacknowledged conviction of a beneficent deity that we demand that the Ineffable shall reveal Himself to us for less dedication of self to a purpose than goes to the buying of a cabbage. God is the only commodity we expect to get for nothing. No astronomer sits down with folded hands and gazing into space expects the secrets of the heavens to drop into his mind. He first imagines there are hidden stars; then, with unbelievable ingenuity he constructs a telescope and with incalculable devotion trains his sight; thus, employing both implement and eyes, he discovers new constella-

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

tions. Columbus did not expect to establish the fact of a western continent without using a ship. We sometimes read of a doctor who has gone to his death to prove that a certain germ exists; but when do we read of a Christian of today who has gone to his death to prove that a certain God exists? Yet this is precisely what Jesus did. Jesus of Galilee imagined that a God of love exists and he lived his life and died his death on that hypothesis. It is a flat, scientific fact absurd for any Christian to deny, that the only way to know Jesus is to use our imagination as he used his. But it is equally absurd for any scientist to disparage the use of imagination in religion, seeing that no smallest discovery of science could be made without the use of imagination. Without imagination, no hypothesis; without hypothesis, no science. And it is equally true that if science stopped with hypothesis, there would be no science. There would be no aviation if Icarus and the Wright brothers had not risked their lives on a dream. Take out of the world today all that came into it when Jesus of Nazareth risked his life

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

on a dream, and just what would be left?

I believe that every honest scientist, standing alone, eye to eye, with the Galilean, recognizes the scientist in Jesus. Yet science accuses Christians of being visionary, and the charge is just for Christians, but not for Christ. The difference between the visioned man and the visionary is that the visioned man dares to put his hypothesis to proof. Science is now blaming Christianity for not being sufficiently humanitarian. To whose cowardice is it due that the real reproach of science is not that we Christians believe a dream, but that we do not believe it enough to live it, as science lives its dreams? Until we dare to live our vision, we shall never convince a doubting world of its reality, but far more significantly, we shall never convince our doubting selves of its reality. The way to know is to dare. To know Jesus we must first obey him, and in that *first* lies the whole law of method for discovery. No other knowledge is bought without risk, yet we expect religion to come to us in that tame and supine way! How many times did Jesus say, "Only

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

by doing the doctrine shall you know its truth!" Yet we are very proud of discussing and discussing and discussing religion and religions, curiously enough seeming to believe this to be a scientific manner of approach. Yet any scientist would be thought a fool who expected to know chemistry without ever performing an experiment or to know astronomy by pulling the shades and closing the doors and arguing with a group of others as ignorant as himself the possible existence of the sun.

The law of all human knowledge from the day the first ape tottered upright, has been, first, hypothesis, then experiment, then conviction. If we had not obeyed this law we should never have known anything of the sky and air and earth or of the body we briefly inhabit; and yet in that most momentous knowledge of all, the knowledge of God, we expect to abrogate this method. If there be a God beyond our human senses, would he have chosen a way of revelation that was effortless and an insult to our powers, or a way difficult and audacious beyond reckoning?

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

Fouled with familiarity yet deathless, a command has been blazoned across our darkness. There is no risk in the world so intrepid as to love our fellow-man. Yet across the blackness of human bewilderment, still burns that fiery command. First, risk your own soul in love for your fellows, and then perhaps you shall discover that even so does a God of love risk his own soul for his faith in us!

Throughout his thirty-odd years of earth, Jesus of Galilee walked, unswerving and intrepid, a dizzying path of conjecture. Unless we, faint and blind and doubtful of our capacities, shall attain some few steps along that path, we shall never come near enough to him to know who he is. Jesus in human experience is a more mysterious phenomenon than is Jesus in human history. The question, "Who is Jesus?" has always been too profound for the limitations of theology, or of scholarship, or of science, so that for any individual, either of the first century or of the twentieth, to delegate the answer to the theologian or to the scholar or to the scientist has always entailed the rejecting of a per-

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

sonal adventure, and the declining of a strangely personal association. Not in the scant records of Scripture, not in church tradition or church dogma, not in all the material all history affords, shall we discover Jesus of Galilee unless steadfastly we employ the same methods he employed for discovering himself. The method by which we come to see Jesus is more significant for his identity than is the actual historical material out of which he is shaped to our sight. Because for nearly two thousand years that method has been neglected, Jesus remains only an abortive influence on human affairs, and Christianity remains only a mockery of its protestations. But today something new has happened, a new attitude of mind toward all subjects. Science is now setting Christians an example of applied method. From the scientists of our era we may learn the courage needed to approach Jesus. It is the science of our day that is emboldening Christianity to free itself from the cerements of the past, and once again to enter history in a confident resurrection.

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

There is a patriotism due to one's period as well as to one's country, an allegiance and an enthusiasm due to that era as well as to that land which one is privileged to inhabit. We are living in a day when science has made the whole world new. Science has unveiled new constellations. Science has taught us to ride the air, and to descend into the sea and paint pictures of its secrets. Research has laid bare a hidden past, so that great kings pass before our eyes in all their golden splendor, or pressing into that darkness back of all kings, back of all men, we can watch strange reptiles unfurl their giant wings, or a behemoth plant its giant feet. Science has revealed the incredible intricacies of the human body, and the more incredible subtleties of the human brain. Science has ripped away the curtains of space and annulled the laws of time, so that a ten-year-old schoolboy knows how to penetrate the air and listen to voices speaking in San Francisco, and may presently with some home-made apparatus be photographing a live African jungle. Merely to be alive in a period of such accomplishment makes

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

the blood leap with pride! And yet to my own mind, as, all humbly, I dare to scan for myself the astounding achievements of our day, I seem to see an even greater contribution of science to civilization. Science has performed miracles beyond the mind's believing, yet its miracles are physical, its discoveries are material. But the method used for all its miracles, for all its discoveries, is still greater than any one of its miracles, than any one of its discoveries, even though these are the greatest the human mind has made in all its history. The method of intrepid hypothesis, of intrepid experiment, wrought as now into the very texture of all human thinking, is destined for future achievement that we cannot yet measure or compute. Not *what* we have discovered but *how*, has enfranchised us for all the days to come. And the profoundest import of scientific method is something not yet clearly perceived, for this method of audacious and exhaustless adventure, now forever established as the law of all advance, is applicable not only to the body and to the brain, but also to the soul. Seeing

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

all about him what man's intellect has accomplished, and how, the Christian is beginning to ask himself, "What might man's spirit also accomplish if released by the same technique?" It may be that science in some far future may exhaust all its present limitless domain. Some day the clouds may have become sordid with our treading, some day the earth may have been sifted to its last grain, and the cells of our brain shredded to the ultimate atom, but the method by which science scrutinizes cloud and earth and cell may have emancipated the race of man to a spiritual achievement which shall be exhaustless.

It is impossible that science should be dominating all our era and Christianity remain much longer dull to the stimulus of its example. All these centuries Christianity has gone crippled because it has failed to practise the law of action as the means to conviction, that law of Christ the boldest scientist of all—first *do*, then *know*. Already there are signs all about us that Christianity is waking. Not only in general appeal to bravery, but in many

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

specific ways science can now be seen assisting in the cleansing and renewing of a long-cowardly Christian faith.

Two tendencies of present-day religion may be traced directly to science and with these tendencies the liberal Christian is in complete sympathy. One of these two tendencies is the decay of authority. Everywhere around us we can observe the discarding of outworn standards. Social, moral, religious, governmental, artistic—all age-old commandments and prohibitions are being questioned. Experimentation is being applied to every department of life. But when all the time-worn standards go crumbling, a man must look to his own feet. Never did any period afford such incentive to individual discovery. Creed and dogma are being reexamined as relentlessly as are the mechanics of sight and sound. Just as each one of us will be forced to adjust his daily living to the physical fact of television, so on any day we may see dogma and denomination relentlessly swept away because some scientist of the soul has discovered a religious television which suddenly brings

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

each man of us face to face with God. Old authority is passing. In every realm, discovery, experiment, invention, is taking its place, establishing a new authority adjusted to meet neglected facts. Before today's revelation of new physical forces, any lonely investigator may bring forth new discoveries, may invent new mechanisms, of inestimable value to the race. In all the reaches of science there is this sense of ever-imminent discovery. No one knows what any man may disclose on any day. The Christian also, like the scientist, is at this hour stimulated, set quiveringly expectant, by the decay of old authority, and the imminence of new energies to be released in religion. Perhaps the Christian of today, no longer comforted by ancient ecclesiastical prestige, but standing, lonely and needy, in the mysterious laboratory of the soul, may discover both for himself and for others new forces in faith, new ways of chaining and employing those forces, which shall constitute a revolution in religious thinking as epochal for Christianity as the newly revealed energies of the atom have been for physics.

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

Words and wordy emotion no longer characterize the Christianity now in process of renewal. Logic and austerity distinguish the religious books of today, and when were there so many religious books written and read as now? Where can you find closer-knit argument than in Canon Streeter's "Reality" or more clear-cut arraignment than in Reinhold Niebuhr's "Does Civilization Need Religion?" or Dick Sheppard's "Impatience of a Parson"? Today Christians are not afraid to think. They are afraid not to.

Science is contributing its clarity and its virility to the whole range of Christian opinion and Christian decision. Alignments once hazy are becoming unavoidably clear. We are perceiving the humor of any one's going about with a Bible in one hand and a bayonet in the other. The grim satire of this equipment has been revealed to us by those realistic habits of mind which science inculcates even in the kindergarten. We are beginning to chuckle if an industrial magnate grinds up a child worker in his mills, but standing in church shouts lustily to be cleansed by the

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

blood of the crucified one. The personal salvation of such a man no longer seems to us important. The straddle is rapidly becoming not merely an unpopular Christian gesture, it is fast becoming an impossible one. That little label Christian is not the easy label it used to be. In a scientific age, we Christians are ourselves holding it to its significance.

The relentless logic imposed on us by a scientific upbringing has suggested that gun-boats are hardly the best support for the missionaries who carry the gospel of love, and almost overnight missionaries themselves rejected this policy of protection. Of late, church investigations have gained from every one a new respect for the church. Church researches into prohibition, into the condition of the steel mills and of the mines, and into divorce have exhibited an impartiality and exhaustiveness that reflect the spirit of the laboratory. It is the logic and honesty learned from the test-tube in high school and college that preach to every clear-headed Christian, "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only." The service of twentieth century

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

science to twentieth century Christianity may be to release it from that spirit of compromise which for twenty centuries has helped to seal the spirit of Christ in his tomb.

In addition to a new virility and candor of thinking, science is contributing two specific aids to the emancipation of a resurgent Christianity. And as I write these words I am not picturing Christianity and science as two opposing and mutually exclusive systems. Rather I am thinking of the interrelation of science and religion within the Christian's own mind. Not our reply to some scientist in the press or on the platform concerns us, but our reply to that scientist resident in our own cranium. It is this scientist within himself that is now offering to the Christian two challenges to reorient himself in his own faith. The first challenge is the immediacy and practicality by which science reckons its achievement. Can the Christian faith also be measured by its practicality for the present, or does its claim belong to a doubtful past or to a still more doubtful post-mundane future? The

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

second challenge lies in the fact that the physical miracles of science now surpass the physical miracles of Jesus; therefore, in the light of the signs and wonders now being performed by material agencies all about us, what is the present relation of Christian faith to the miraculous element in the gospels?

These are the two questions science is asking Christianity to answer, and Christianity is answering them, but in ways that rend the cloak of dogma, and test theology to the bone. Religion is always shy about casting off grave-clothes. Christianity is still so swathed in medievalism that even a well-informed scientist can in this morning's paper reproach Christians for a Kingdom of Heaven built not on earth but in the sky. The essence of all medievalism is evasion, but what live Christian is today thinking of the Kingdom of Heaven as located in the firmament or in the future? The Middle Ages put it there because they were thus wholly exonerated from building it. It will be long before the church of Christ is wholly extricated from cramping medieval conceptions, but we may be grate-

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

ful to science for that spiritual clarification and emancipation which are now driving us to reëxamine Jesus' own conception of his kingdom. Nothing about Jesus is so mysterious as his reverence for the world he lived in and for that humanity he shared. Nothing has so delayed the establishment of Jesus' social order as the cowardly relegating of it to some misty post-mundane future. An intricate hierarchy, an elaborate association of spirits, is associated with the word Christianity, but what words of Jesus justify this? What honest scientist, what honest Christian, can read the words of Jesus and accuse him of formulating either the medieval Heaven or the medieval Hell? Both were for the medieval mind ways of escape from Jesus' dynamic and immediate command for this earth, Love one another. Because science is speaking to us within our own minds, we Christians, now reëxamining our faith, are discovering in it its burning Now and Here. It was because Jesus perceived in earthly life the possibilities of a beauty no other man has ever seen that he suffered as no other man has ever

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

suffered at the thought of leaving this our earth. What was the temptation in Gethsemane except the temptation to stay and himself build his kingdom upon earth rather than to die, trusting us to build it for him?

Never, I hope, do I lose sight of the fact that I am speaking only for one Christian, only for myself; and yet I cannot help hoping that I may be speaking for others also, as I seek to analyze my own attitude toward the miracles of science and toward the miracles of Jesus. As I glance from the pages of the *New York Times* to the pages of the New Testament, the prodigies accomplished by modern science seem to me greater than any marvels recorded of Jesus. The effort to believe the physical wonders accomplished by science requires a greater exercise of sheer credulity than to believe the physical wonders accomplished by Jesus. Therefore it cannot be the mere degree of miracle we stick at, but something else; and I wish both scientist and Christian might begin to acknowledge the truth that Jesus of Nazareth has never been

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

either accepted or denied on a basis of pure miracle, but rather on a basis of explanation of that miracle. This truth he himself was the first to perceive clearly. In a decade when science by a voice from a telephone can animate a mechanical man to unfurl a flag or press an electric button, it should involve no strain on credulity to believe that a voice once animated a dead man. A mechanism from which life has departed is no more dead than a mechanism into which life has never entered. It is, therefore, not the mere obedience of a dead body to a voice that we object to. The crux is that the voice of Jesus has been held to be the voice of God, and the telephone command makes no such claim.

An age accustomed to gliding on air may not with honesty quibble about walking on water, for any man may be doing that tomorrow. What we really refuse to accept is that Jesus had spiritual power to tread the waves. Has an age that calmly discusses ectogenesis any right to deny the possibility of parthenogenesis? What we do deny is the divine intervention implied. The pulmator has

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

achieved greater prodigies than the raising of Jairus' daughter. The telephone is a greater wonder than making the dumb speak. Television is a greater wonder than making the blind see. The modern doctor has performed greater healing than Jesus. "Greater works than these shall ye do." We have done them.

Seeing the miracles of modern science the modern Christian has been forced to reëvaluate his faith in order to ascertain how far it is affected by the miracles of Jesus. For myself, merely one Christian of many, I discover that if every miracle of Jesus were deleted from the New Testament, I should still find the character of Jesus the greatest miracle the world has ever witnessed. Whence did this man come? How did he make himself what he is? Why is he still here? The marvels of modern science outshine the marvels of Jesus in every way but one—their motive. Every miracle of science can be explained on the basis of a purely physical universe, and possibly even the miracles of Jesus will eventually be thus explained. But Jesus himself cannot be thus explained.

## THE JESUS OF EXPERIENCE

The greatest gift that modern science has given to civilization is not the material but the method of its discoveries. The greatest gift that modern science may give to Christianity is this method of fearless hypothesis and fearless experiment. The greatest gift that modern science has already given to many a Christian, a gift to be proved only by intrepid adventure, is the realization that the Christian faith rests not on any physical miracle, but rests forever on the miracle of a Personality.

# THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE



### CHAPTER III

ONE has a right to any creed, provided only it shall not be lazy or machine-made or aggressive. We are each one walking, with more bravery than we realize, through an era that becomes constantly more puzzling. It might help if we would more often stop to examine, each for himself, our own day-by-day solution. The present world is unstable enough to justify any one in solitary adventure, even if that adventure is only the earnest individual exploration of an ancient path.

Two years ago I was sitting at luncheon in the Women's University Club of New York with a friend whom I had known just three days. There is something curious in the swiftness with which one thinking Christian recognizes another. It is perhaps much like the lightning scrutiny and confidence with which the first harried members of Christ's secret ranks used to discover each other amid the

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

proud, rushing crowds of that earlier empire. As we two women talked, she chanced to say to me, "Of course you qualify as a present-day mystic."

Her quick label startled me like a razor blade flashed to the core of my thinking, and at first it hurt me almost as much, for that word instantly sets one apart. People think of a mystic at worst as a mere religious day-dreamer, and at best as one whose faith comes by lucky endowment, not by grim experience and fierce effort. And more, the appellation, mystic, if lightly accepted for oneself might easily lead to a self-destructive posing. But as time goes on, and as day by day the face of Jesus of Nazareth becomes for me ever more real and more arresting, I have come to feel that it is imperative for every honest Christian to be a mystic, provided that word shall stand for vigorous activity and not for sleepy contemplation.

For the fresh and personal analysis of my own vision the word mysticism needs defining, for it is a moot term of theology, a term shredded into subtleties upon which I here

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

make no attempt to enlarge. Mysticism has, of course, its exact and technical meaning and its carefully formulated religious practices, but I ask permission to employ the word as it may appeal to the active, outgoing, twentieth-century Christian. I am discussing not an esoteric doctrine but a practical method which I have sought to elucidate for myself in the hope that there may be some of my fellow Christians who like me feel compelled always to verify authority by experience, and who like me must always be finding their own way to God through the mazes of church teaching. Both in theological terminology and in personal application, mysticism may be described as the direct contact of the soul with God, but for myself this definition is not sufficiently concrete, not sufficiently stimulating. For a long time I have been searching either in some one else's book or in my own mind for an interpretation of mysticism that shall energize rather than lull. For a while I was satisfied with the familiar one, mysticism is the practice of the presence of God; more recently, however, I have tentatively

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

phrased a definition that expresses my need for the specific and the austere,—mysticism is the practice of the presence of the risen Jesus. This is a phrasing that may prove creative in its effect, for it involves the testing of capacities too long neglected by Christianity, but once bold enough for martyrdom, and certainly still worthy of experiment. The first disciples were not only mad enough to preach the resurrection but mad enough to live it. Are we Christians of today mistaken in thinking that a risen Presence stands beside us, or in this scoffing, power-maddened world, is the shaping of history being once more entrusted to hands so despised by the mighty that only their Creator could know their hidden courage?

By the practice of the presence of the risen Jesus I mean the stern and dogged effort to make the actual Galilean as real to us as he was to Mary Magdalen on Easter Morning or to Paul on the road to Damascus. I mean devoting the finest energy of our being to making the peasant Carpenter of Nazareth come alive beside us and then trying to obey

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

every word we imagine him as saying to us. Every one has the right to dedicate the imagination to whatever dream he chooses. Ten thousand times we shall fail of our endeavor, but we shall have chosen definitely to spend our brief and precarious earth-sojourn in the constant study and companionship of a man who lived his own earth-life in complete triumph over circumstance. Jesus of Nazareth never flinched from the conjecture on which he determined to base his life. In this blind present there are many trails that beckon. The thinking Christian has tried to find that one which promises the most adventure.

All roads to the living Christ have the same general direction, the same general aids to guidance. Each one of us has the Bible to help him and church tradition and the stimulus of other lives that are boldly spiritual. Yet in essence the path to any god must be separate, experimental, lonely. The strongest evidence of a renewed Christianity today is that so many people are trying to find Jesus for themselves. Ever since, two years ago, my friend labeled me with that word I have

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

been trying to think out what it means to be a mystic. If I here set down the results of that thinking it is without any attempt to be either persuasive or conclusive. Next week, next month, next year may bring me new illumination on a pilgrimage. In these puzzling days, perhaps each one of us, all humbly, owes his neighbors his own experiment. If Mary or Peter or Thomas or Cleopas or Paul had kept silent, perhaps there would be no Christian church today celebrating Christ's own Easter.

This is a most complex period, so that there are many angles from which mysticism must meet the shock of contact. Any one who attempts actually to walk beside a risen Jesus, must adjust to alien social and civic relationships, must formulate a way of adapting himself to the intellectual tendencies of these times, must find a means of fellowship with a church that often looks askance at independent vision, and, further, the Christian mystic must determine whether the sober literalness of his religious adventure contributes to his own soul's shrinkage or to its expansion; and

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

last and highest need of all, the Christian mystic must ask himself what light his reverent method of companionship may throw upon the hidden face of God.

In all the relations of friendship or of citizenship, mysticism is a matter of stern and incessant personal adjustment. To be a mystic means loneliness, and since there is something invincibly friendly in the Christ philosophy of life, this loneliness is painful to any one who attempts this philosophy. For me at this moment, the faces of imaginary readers divide into three groups, each one significant of the present-day Christian's connection with the actual people about him. The first group is made up of those who not only do not themselves perceive the Galilean trudging the dusty, bewildered streets of today, but think any one who does see him is a fool. This first division of my contemporaries separates instantly into two, exactly as the contemporaries of the first Christians probably did. In genial, worldly old Rome it was no doubt often a hard thing for the Christian to meet pity in the affectionate eyes

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

of pagan friends, whose tolerance would have been most lovable. But there must have been others among the Christian's acquaintance whose contempt was so avowed and impenetrable that it must have needed vigorous control not to meet scorn with scorn. Men virile enough to face lions for their faith, must surely sometimes have longed to unleash tongues, held sternly Christ's, against foes who regarded Christians as unworthy any argument but laughter.

But to be a mystic in an age of materialism is not the only solitude caused by vision. The second circle of readers that I can picture is composed of church-people, and for the doubt and puzzlement in the eyes of some of these I have no answer. In this age the mystic's relation to his church is his heaviest problem. From this second group I turn to the third, that number who are to be found both in the churches and outside of them, those fellow-Christians who with me see today a newly risen God. These who are now following a renewed and deathless hope,—I think I can write freely to them, for them. They will see

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

eye to eye with me, they will hear ear to ear with me, as I set down this stammering effort of approach, for they are, also, each one making his own reverent exploration.

I once suggested to an editor that I wanted to write an essay on a certain problem considered from the point of view of a "thinking Christian."

"That is a contradiction in terms," he replied with what was meant to be weight. Presently he launched into the information that he himself contemplated writing a book on "the chemical basis of religion."

I could not explain to him my own feeling that the charming courtesy with which he talked to such a hopelessly superstitious fool as myself was an even greater contradiction than the existence of a creature named "thinking Christian." Can a chemical basis for religion explain that fine network of small kindly ways by which civilization girdles the earth? The existence of evil can be easily explained by any naturalistic philosophy, but how about the existence of good? Good that we've every one of us seen irradiating the lives

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

everywhere about us? I perceive and freely admit that animal instincts can be everywhere observed working up to sublimation in human motives. But no matter how much you refine a tigress' devotion to her cubs, I can't see instinct, unaided, ever producing a Sir Philip Sidney. There remains a perplexing residuum of pure beauty to account for. For myself I was compelled to argue my way to God because I found the problem of good so staggering.

Argument, however, is a duty one owes to oneself, but as a social indulgence it is inexcusable. There is no argument for faith, unless by chance one should be oneself the argument. As some far-off Christian in old Rome may have sat pondering his pagan acquaintance, so I am at this minute thinking of my own immediate associates who cannot share my faith. I have many agnostic friends, as dear to me as I to them. I find myself thinking of them a little wistfully, for we all want people we care for to understand us, but I know they will view what I am here writing as one more vagary of some one whom they

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

love, but whose superstition they cannot comprehend. Yet Christians always waste time in trying to explain to non-Christians the reasons for their faith, and non-Christians waste time in trying to explain away those reasons. Both of us must live together in daily, incessant intimacy, intimacy often of blood-kinship, intimacy of deep friendships, not to mention the wider social and community relations. Here we are, those of us who see Jesus and those of us who don't, inseparably knitted together in all our daily life. The sole thing that is important is not why we Christians credit the incredible, but just how far is our credulity going to affect our actions? By no reasoning whatsoever will either agnostic or Christian convince the other of anything except his own sincerity, a sincerity which each is bound to respect because of the sacredness of all friendship. For example, to my agnostic friend, my belief in personal immortality must appear a gross delusion, but my practice of this belief is the only thing that concerns him. Unless my conception of immortality makes me a more buoyant comrade, he need

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

not have it on his conscience to disabuse me of my superstition. On the other hand, if it does give me a more whole-hearted chuckle at ephemeral troubles, why should he himself not benefit by my attitude, so long as I have the decency not to argue about it?

The uselessness of discussion holds also for wider concerns than those of friendship. It is the Christian's fault that all governments everywhere are still non-Christian. The non-Christian state government wastes breath and paper in arguing with the Christian citizen. The only thing that concerns the state in its relation to those of its citizens who are Christian is whether or not these have sufficient conviction and courage to dedicate their faith to the service of their country. My definition of Christian here is, of course, one who believes in practising the teaching of Jesus. Whether it is our friend or our community or our national government that is dealing with us Christians, the only thing that matters to any one of the three is not what we believe, but how far is our belief going to affect our conduct, for it is only our actions that can in

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

turn affect the actions of friend or of municipality or of state in relation to us.

While with my personal friends, the chasm that separates their honest agnosticism from my honest faith is bridged by tolerance and sheer affection, I feel no such happy forbearance toward the standardized attitude of our so-called intellectuals toward the Christian's belief. I confess here to a hot and too human resentment. Every day of my life I send up the prayer, God help me not to scorn the scornful! All contemptuous people seem to me to lack the spirit of adventure. Pessimism is easy. Any child can operate it, as many youthful writers at present testify by their works. Besides to any one who has ever ventured into any literary regions antedating 1910, the fancied novelty of today's pessimism seems a little crude. When I want to read the literature of pessimism, and I sometimes do, provided it is entertaining, I go back to those old writers who can say something new. I do not know what Juvenal and Swift are going to say before they say it. Pessimism is easy, and nowadays the quality

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

is inferior because of its mass production. But any optimism robust enough to bear the sordid usage to which it must be put today demands a loneliness of experiment, both intellectual and spiritual, which the machine-made pessimist of today is not brave enough to make. An adventurous humility—that is hardly the key to life that we would expect our American intelligentsia to receive. It seems to be different across the ocean. At least no stigma seems to attach to the intellectual integrity of Lord Charnwood or Barbusse, or Margaret Macdonald, or Middleton Murry because they have dared to go forth, each alone, into the highways and by-ways of the human soul, and there examine a deathless Jesus.

One thing that the practice of mysticism demands of the mystic is an open-minded observation of the effect of the returned Galilean upon the people who see him. As I look to and fro over my times, and consider the manifold enlargement of personality in Arthur Nash, in Wilfrid Grenfell, in Albert Schweitzer,—doctor, philosopher, author, musician,

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

—in Ramsay Macdonald under the influence of his wife's faith, I feel that I have a right to search for the hidden strength within these personalities rather than for the obvious weakness in others to whom all belief in the unseen is laughable. Both in books and out of them, I get more stimulus from association with those Christians who practise their faith, than with other people who practise their non-faith. It seems to me intellectual dishonesty to deny that the invisible Jesus has a visible influence on the persons who think they see him. From his first resurrection down through those many others through the ages, Jesus has always had the same effect, an inexplicable enlargement of personality. I would rather stand with Paul of Tarsus than with Henry Mencken because, in all honesty, Paul seems to me the bigger man. Yet up to that day when Paul thought he saw Jesus, he was no bigger than a Menckenite. When I look at the stature of the men and women of the past who have seen Jesus, and at the stature of the men and women of the present who see him, I feel that without any discredit-

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

ing of my intellectual processes, I have the right to say, straight into the teeth of all materialists, I stake my life on my conviction that a risen Jesus walks beside me.

Apart from his conduct as friend and as citizen, the Christian mystic needs to ascertain and to formulate his adjustment to the general intellectual tendencies of his generation. This is a subtle and self-conscious age dominated by the stern realism of science and deafened by the thunder of machinery. Is it really possible for one to walk the streets of New York, read its newspapers, its novels, listen to lectures that proclaim a hundred panaceas, attend plays of brutal pessimism, perceive all the rush and fever, and yet preserve beside one the unfailing companionship of a Hebrew carpenter dead twenty centuries ago? Yes, I think it is possible, and far more than possible, for it provides the most varied and stimulating adventure that I have ever found. Jesus of Nazareth, looking over my shoulder as I read the morning's headlines, and pronouncing his clear-eyed comment, Jesus of Nazareth reading some adolescent

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

novel and saying in genuine amusement, "Children shaking bones as a baby does a rattle!" Jesus of Nazareth beside me in the theater, whispering to me, "O woman, pity! Can you not see the starving hearts beneath the cynicism?" Surely for the Christian of today the comradeship of Jesus is no more difficult and no less illuminating than for the Christian in old Rome.

For the present achievements of science, Jesus would, I believe, have profound respect, but he would measure these accomplishments by his own unvarying standard. Who cannot hear him say, regarding our amazing inventions, our almost-human machines, "Inventor, you have found many ways for taking life from men; show me now also your devices for giving life to men." Jesus, standing beside me, seems to caution me always to distinguish between the two types of scientists today before the public. There is a type noisy and blatant, and far too influential upon many a popular novelist and upon many a man in the street, which illogically asserts that the discoveries of science necessitate the scrapping

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

of age-old religion and of that age-old morality won by the human race with such difficulty. There is, on the other hand, that nobler number of men of science, whose aspiration and whose eloquence remind one often of the Hebrew prophets, and set them at once in the procession of the seers. For these the Christian may have utter veneration, looking at them, reading their interpretation of their own researches, until this thought comes to the mind. If one slips boldly out from the confining walls of one's little decade and looks up into the stars, confident of a far-off dawn, one is permitted a surmise. Long, long ago, primitive man stood forth alone in an unknown universe, alien, hostile, terrifying, and slowly, aided only by fumbling instincts and rudimentary brain and scant experience, this primitive man guessed a way to a God back of the sky. Once again man is standing, alone, gazing into the sky. Science in a few brief apocalyptic years has revealed a universe of new unsolved mystery. Because those earliest ever-aspiring guesses toward a God have been leading men's thoughts for so

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

many æons, no one of us today considers this newly mysterious universe as hostile. Religion has been so long active in the world that not even a convinced atheist now feels the strange, secret cosmos as unfriendly, but rather as holding a bounty that only needs human investigation for its release. Is it possible that the scientist of this day, standing alone before the unpenetrated riddles of nature, as once did primitive man, may, with instincts now investigated and controlled, with brain now developed and keen, with a far-flung background of history, humbly, slowly, guess his way to an ever greater God back of the sky?

Even though day by day the relentless test-tube imposes new austerity upon our careless thinking, even though louder and louder each hour buzzes and throbs all our modern machinery, the Christian mystic would still attempt his life of spiritual communion rather in coalescence with his period than in severance from it. Here again the essential friendliness of the Christ's man asserts itself. The Christian desires to be as respectful to the

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

tendencies of his period as he is to his agnostic friends. All cloistered separateness is alien to the thoughtful Christian of this present chiefly because to him the essence of the cloister seems subterfuge and evasion of personal obligation. Both place and period are part of that environment God chose for the best exercise of our individuality. If God selected for the modern Christian an era of science he had a purpose in so doing, and that purpose it is our duty to discover if we believe that throughout history the shifting contemporary scene serves always for some fresh revelation of the eternal. How may the mystic so employ and yet so test and sift the scientific mental habits of his day as to make more vivid for himself that invisible Presence that dominates his course?

It is only with sincere hesitation that I am here recording for the possible aid of some other groping thinker the ways I myself have traced in fitting my thoughts to the thought of my day. My own attitude toward science is summarized in the brief rule, Employ its methods, but sift its conclusions. As test for

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

this sifting, study whether the conclusions and directions science announces as result of its data contribute toward racial advance and personal initiative, or the opposite. If they make toward reversion or stagnation either as regards race or individual reject them as false to Christ's conception of character. For example, the Christian may accept the attitude of behavioristic psychology as wholesome reaction against Freudian introspection, but the Christian is bound to refuse all behavioristic advice that tends to perpetuate herd-wisdom and herd-morals. Over-advocacy of social adjustment would retard the race on that upward march which has always been dependent on the leadership of intrepid individuals.

Science is of incalculable aid to the mystic because it gives a constant example of brave experiment, and also because it imposes upon him the constant effort toward clarified thinking. Scientific mental habits reveal to the Christian that mysticism is a method, not a condition of mind, and also show him that the material with which science deals is different from the material with which religion deals.

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

Science has to do with substance, religion has to do with soul. The Christian believes he has a soul because of the way it suffers and aspires. To the development of this soul the mystic would apply the same courageous technique that under science he applies to his body and his brain. Logic, not emotion, is the requirement of the scientist within the mystic of today. If mysticism be described as the determined, unremitting attempt to make the bravest man in history alive beside you, then mysticism becomes a stern and rigorous intellectual practice. To force yourself each hour to look at the seething life around you and into the seething self within you as the risen Galilean might look if he actually walked at your side, there is nothing soft or easy about such effort! Mysticism is not mush, it is the rigorous sifting over of all the data of life to one end, namely, living.

For the twentieth-century Christian, adjustment to science is often far easier than adjustment to contemporary ecclesiasticism. Even the terminology of science comes mor-

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

quickly to the tongue than the terminology of dogma or of ritual. From the kindergarten on, science asks us to think for ourselves, and then we try to pass from laboratory to sacred edifice, and find the church asking to do our thinking for us. We are further puzzled by the honest fact, which ought to be more frankly faced, that while we talk and write of "the Christian church," it would be hard to point to any one entity that corresponds to that word, and yet in spite of this we hold "the church" responsible for a great many things,—rather unfairly. Look at modern life and then try to point out to an intelligent heathen just what and where is "the church." There is a great Roman church, there are many Protestant denominations, but just which portals, specifically, is the modern mystic to enter? Oh, these same portals will provide their instant, hundred answers! But I, along with uncounted others, demand to answer the question for myself. It happens that once when I was thinking hard over this matter of church affiliation, there came into my mind the following fable, which perhaps

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

expresses better than any other words of mine could do the attitude of many Christians.

### *It Really Happened*

It was Saturday evening in New York, and the rain was falling in sheets. The gleaming pavements were awash like a ship's deck and little rivulets cascaded down the subway stairs. Behind the streaming downpour the ruddy shop fronts seemed far distant. Beneath the blurry, endless street lights the procession of hurrying, drenched figures stretched interminable. In spite of the packed crowds the downfall seemed to separate every man from his fellows, each hastening blindly somewhere in the pelting rain.

But no one was too blind to see each for himself the strange signs that leaped out of the wet dark at every corner, that threaded the network of the elevated, and glowed at every subway station—recurrent, standing placards brilliantly illuminated from behind, so that the black letters stood out indelibly:

JESUS OF NAZARETH  
WILL PREACH  
IN THIS CITY  
TOMORROW MORNING  
AT ELEVEN

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

The next day the black drenched Saturday night was swept away by a golden Sunday morning. Earliest spring glistened on sprouting crocuses and softened tree branches with the hint of buds. Little clouds scudded across the blue band of sky above Fifth avenue. By ten o'clock the street was an endless stream of cars and pedestrians. Everybody went to church that morning. There was not standing room left in any church.

The headlines of the Monday papers, however, were bitter, and with reason. The press had had a reporter in every church in the city and even in the Jewish temples and in the socialist Sunday schools. Every reporter had brought back word of crowds everywhere, but a few of the newspapermen who sometimes went to church on other Sundays than this one had remarked an amazing state of affairs. Not one of the churches had had its usual congregation. The faces in all the pews were strange in that particular edifice. It appeared that, while all the city had gone to hear Jesus of Nazareth preach, there had been an amazing divergence of opinion as to where he might be found. So eager was everybody to hear, this once, the Preacher of all the ages, that at the last moment each began to have misgivings whether Jesus would select his own

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

church to speak in. As the churchgoer now recollected, that actual long-ago Jesus was a little incalculable. When you really thought of him as returning, how could you be sure where he would choose to preach?

In the very act of plunging on to his own church, all confident in the spring sunshine, the churchgoer found himself pausing, wondering. Was he quite sure Jesus would occupy that particular pulpit? People began to hesitate, began to move in unexpected directions, so as not to risk missing Jesus. The Episcopalian queried in his heart whether Jesus, that hot-blood Galilean, might not prefer the spontaneity of the Methodist pulpit. The Methodist began to doubt whether Jesus, that majestic teacher of old, might not incline to the dignity of the Church of England. Some Catholics even went so far as to consider whether Jesus would not embrace the opportunity of pleading with a Protestant assembly for a return to the ancient fold, while some Protestants felt that Jesus, who had once founded his church on a rock, might now turn to an edifice built on the name of his own Peter. There were even a few Christians who joined the nearest Jewish congregation, as the place probably most homelike to Jesus the Jew, while some Jews penetrated the nearest

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

Christian sanctuary in the hope of hearing a great prophet.

So it came about that there were only two facts that the reporters brought back to their offices on that Sunday morning, and these two facts duly flamed in the headlines of Monday's papers. First, no one on that historic day appeared to have attended his own church. The second fact was that no one could be found in all the city who had heard Jesus of Nazareth preach.

The newspapers protested savagely. Were the Saturday night placards merely a gigantic advertising hoax on the part of the churches? Whence had the signs so abruptly appeared? And whither had they so completely disappeared? Off went the reporters again to investigate the mystery, but without success. Neither any church nor any advertising concern could be found that was responsible. It was a blind search, and by Thursday the whole incident was forgotten.

But one dreamy cub reporter had somehow wandered off that Monday morning from his sleuth-work on the Saturday placards, enticed away by a little spring breeze with a whiff of salt in it. Down by the water front he came upon a little group of sailors on shore leave, seated on a pile of bales in the sunshine.

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

They were talking too earnestly to notice an eavesdropper. Their voices shrilled and boomed discussing the strange thing that had happened to them the morning before. They had been seated as now in the sun on the pier above the lapping water when suddenly a young man joined them. They had neither seen nor heard his approach, but they were somehow glad when he genially shoved himself into a place among them. Even though it was Sunday, he was wearing a carpenter's blue jeans, and had a kit of tools slung across his shoulders. His face was a healthy brown and the short curls under his cap were black and crisp like a Jew's.

"We'll none of us ever forget his eyes, nor the laugh of him, never forget nor want to."

The dreamy young reporter, who knew his Ezra Pound, remembered,

"Aye lover he was o' brawny men,  
O' ships and the open sea."<sup>1</sup>

"Did he preach?" he asked.

They guffawed. "Him! No! He wasn't a preacher, just a friendly sort of chap. Didn't talk more than he listened. What he did talk

<sup>1</sup> "The Goodly Fere" from *Personæ: Collected Poems*, by Ezra Pound: Horace Liveright.

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

was all about building, about building ships so strong they could stand any weather."

The reporter drifted away, giving himself up to the spring, pulsing victorious through the teeming city streets. He yielded himself to his thoughts, trusting where they might lead, for he felt it faintly possible he might meet Someone worth talking to. He pulled up sharply before the stately entrance of a skyscraper office building he knew well. He knew it as a structure proud of its secure foundations, its soaring steel framework, but he did not enter by the glittering front. He knew another way, at the back, down an evil-smelling alley, in at a dark door, leading down steps into the basement, then down other blacker steps into the cellar. In the lurid light from an open furnace, a group of stokers, lounging on a coal pile in the murk, were talking. Their blackened faces were only half lit by the red glow. And their growled talk was as ominous as their faces. They were strong men, suffering underground. They desired to rise in shattering power and make others suffer. It was said to be a fireproof building, but the reporter wondered what would happen if ever the flame of their red torches should go roaring up the elevator shaft. But, listening, he caught odd words

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

this morning on the stokers' lips. Something had happened the morning before.

"An outdoor man, by his looks! How did he come down here?"

"It seemed light in the door, him standing there."

"Was he just some fool wandering in? There was country-color in his cheeks."

The reporter broke in, "Did he preach?"

Their eyes narrowed on him, red as tigers' eyes in the dark.

"Preach! Here, in Hell? No! We'd have tossed him into the furnace!"

"Did he stay long?"

"'Bout as long as a whiff of air from up yonder. Long enough for one stretch of our lungs full of coal dust."

"Did he talk?"

"A little. All about building—not tearing down, not burning—building. He was a carpenter. He showed us tools."

The reporter stumbled back up the stairs. "Where else," he thought, "where else did he go yesterday morning?" Once more he let himself wander at the will of the spring that danced along the soiled pavements. At length the chattering of foreign voices recalled him to himself. Push carts jostled for way over the cobbles. Mothers and children flowed

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

from the dark interiors out over the sun-warmed doorsteps. Faces were olive, black-eyed, with jetty curls at the temples. A tall old man in a high fur cap and a long overcoat slowly paced toward the reporter. His skin had the pallor of the sepulcher. His lean hands were a skeleton's, but a strange flame of returning life had set his deep eyes burning beneath the heavy brows. His gaze met the reporter's.

“You, too?” he asked. “Did you see him yesterday?”

“No.”

The old man struggled for the English words.

“Suddenly, right here, looking at me and smiling. Straight, like a cedar. Like new life he spoke to me, like new life!” He passed on, muttering, “A prophet, a prophet come from God.”

From the nearest step a fat, black-wigged madonna beckoned, smiling, to the reporter.

“We, too. We saw him. He talked to us.”

The reporter remembered the reason for the search on which hours before he had set out.

“Did he preach?” he asked.

“Oh, no, not that! He was just a carpenter passing along the street. He stopped to speak

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

to old Nicodemus, then he sat down here on the steps awhile and played with the children. He took a hammer out of his kit and let my little Joshua hold it. He told him to be a carpenter when he grew up, and to build straight houses. It was a good trade, he said."

The reporter rose and went on, thinking hard, while the swarming children darted and shrilled about him in the March sunshine. He thought of the city full of churches where Jesus of Nazareth had not preached. He remembered what had happened when Jesus had tried to preach in his own church in Galilee. He wondered just how rumors of Jesus' presence in New York on the day before might float uncertainly down into history, for the young reporter half believed that Jesus of Nazareth on that spring Sunday had actually chatted with a group of sailors beside the lapping water, had actually tried to envisage for a grim band of plotters a commonwealth not built of blood, had actually paused to put new life into a doddering old rabbi, and actually played with ghetto children on the steps in the sun. The reporter was quite aware that out of his own surmises and the facts he had unearthed he might have woven

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

a splendid story. But yet he kept the story to himself, and never gave it to the tabloid newspaper he served, nor yet to any advertising firm for broadcasting.

It is only honest for me to own that I have spent many churchless years, and that it is only lately I have quietly returned to the fold of my fathers. These are the reasons. For a long time I could see only that Jesus went to the hill-top to pray, that he declared there was a day to come when men would worship not in temple but in spirit, that it was the high priests of a great church organization who gave him to death. And then I began to see other things,—that Jesus went daily to the Temple, a temple desecrated with worldliness, that he went weekly to the synagogue, a little vulgar, sordid, quarrelsome village synagogue. Jesus, who described himself as meek and lowly in heart, was able to worship according to imperfect usages and alongside of imperfect men. I can hardly consider myself superior to Jesus! Jesus died in the effort to combine within the church of his day all

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

that was holiest in tradition with all that was healthiest in innovation. Perhaps Jesus' influence has now been so long alive in his church that the church-member who tries to follow that example would not meet failure.

Without a church, the mystic goes without a home, and spiritual vagabondage is no more nor less fruitful than actual gipsying. Without fellowship one may become an eccentric, and it is hardly common sense to neglect the wisdom of experience and tradition. Solitary, one cannot function in Christian service. The nearest door is probably the best. Most of us have not chosen our denomination any more than we have chosen our family, but there is a divinely intended sacredness about both. Childish associations are a strong element in reverence. The church of one's childhood has its own special welcome, and he who has humbly sought to associate with the risen Galilean may find his Master there. Whatever church he joins, his childhood's or another, it is possible for the mystic to unite with that group within his denomination which is most liberal in thought and most

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

courageous in practice, and while loyal to denomination, he may still try, so far as in him lies, to annul denominationalism, hoping for that future federation of kindred creeds that is even now indicated by the federated activities among many churches. Both church and church-member may some day clarify and develop their potential offerings each to each. In largest sense, the church is the depository of sacred methods and sacred experience, and it exists so that no one need start at the beginning, in the dark, alone, to find God. On the other hand no one can find God at all who does not find Him alone. You have to see Jesus for yourself. It is as if Christ's church said, This is the way to find Christ, as the accumulated wisdom of man has discovered. The mystic then sets forth along these old paths, but perhaps he discovers also others, upturned by recent earthquakes, or perhaps along the old roads he finds new flowers and brings them back to the ancient shrine. Should not the church receive this spring-time tribute? Are gifts for the altar only authentic when they have begun to molder?

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

There are many roads to choose through life, and only seventy short years in which to investigate any one of them. Only a few steps in any direction, and then one passes through the gate of silence. Each one of us is companioned by his own winged soul that demands our accounting for our choice. What has the mystic to say in excuse for his way of life? First, that it is the path Jesus followed, this method of companionship with One unseen and divine, and of all characters in history Jesus seems to me the man most worth imitating because of his self-security. He was afraid of nothing on earth, and he never for one moment desecrated his ideals. He was intrepid in hazarding an hypothesis. Because he dared to believe himself divine he never allowed himself to become soiled with hatred of any one. Because he dared to believe himself immortal, he could indulge his capacity for enjoying this world's commonest beauties. Because he believed in eternity he was able to hold himself a quiescent student of earth and earth's inhabitants for thirty unrecorded years before he felt himself equipped

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

to preach a new gospel. The closer I hold myself to Jesus, the more contagious I find his convictions. Some little of his splendid boldness passes into me, so that in an age black with standardized hatreds, I may have courage to hold my heart reverent toward my fellow man of whatever class or color or nation. In the shadow of his overwhelming Presence how dare the mystic have anything but love for those whom Jesus loves? Inevitably Jesus' attitude becomes, however faintly and hesitantly, one's own, so that the Christian refuses, like Jesus, to foul his own innate divinity by consent to any form of violence. Because Jesus practised the leisure of his immortality, the mystic who accompanies him may turn aside today from the highroads of speed and the pressure of crowds, and with all the dignity of a tiny child, may touch the sacred April arbutus, or take all the hours he needs to watch the southward flight of God's high-winging birds. The fulness of earth is ours because we have Jesus' sanction for joy. Smothered as we are today by over-production of every commodity material or moral

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

or esthetic, the Presence of Jesus beside us gives us courage to be ourselves, free-moving and independent, yet no more eccentric than was he as he swung happily, a young carpenter, along the homely streets of Nazareth.

To practise the presence of the risen Jesus, to make the rustic teacher of Galilee one's closest companion, is to put in action one's entire character, not some broken off part of it. It is the law of Jesus' reality that he is seen by living him, and this high adventure of hypothesis requires the whole of our being. That Jesus had a heart of utter love we learn by first ourselves exercising our own heart in love for our neighbor. That Jesus had a body ever open to the cleansing and healing of inflowing spirit we learn by first subduing our own nerves and impulses to the quiet inpouring of God's quiet. That Jesus possessed a mind of superhuman lucidity we learn by first patterning our own mental processes on his sane, all-seeing thoughts. Every human friendship is an incessant adventure in faith, incessantly rewarded, but the adventure of the friendship of Jesus is for the mystic the

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

most rewarding association to be discovered in life.

The more the mystic holds himself to companionship with a divine man, the more does his own soul seem to him divine. The God-man of Galilee looking at us, speaking to us, seems to discover capacities we did not dream we possessed, capacities we do not in truth possess, except as we yield ourselves utterly to his power to exercise and direct our hidden powers. The enfranchisement of one's whole being that the unseen Galilean imparts suggests not only new knowledge of the soul of man, but new knowledge of God. Is it possible that in offering us Jesus, God is permitting us to take a hazard for Him that shall feebly match the hazard He has perhaps taken for us? The actual Gospels provide us only a meager alphabet in which to spell out for ourselves the terms of a supreme experiment. It is quite possible that we refuse to learn that alphabet. We are quite free to reject the experiment, but to each individual, to each high and lonely human soul, the adventure of Jesus is ever newly offered, down through all

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

the dim and whispering centuries. Out from the dusk of history, recurrently there shines forth a dead man to be made alive in the lives yielded to him. Could any but our Creator have so understood us as to take so mad a risk of preservation? Jesus of Nazareth never wrote a word, though the prophets before him wrote, and the other rabbis of his time wrote. Parchment may crumble. Language itself is only perishable breath. The teacher of Galilee risked writing himself only upon the soul of man. Down through all the years of time he leaves each one of us free to accept his imprint or refuse it. This is the method of preservation he has chosen, still valid up to this very day. The proof of Jesus is the people who live with him. Could any but our Creator have so respected us as to leave us free forever of all coercion to follow or abandon a sublime Example? Jesus of Nazareth entering earth submitted to every human handicap and conquered. He chose a most hazardous manner of transmission, dependent on the voluntary choice of every living man and woman, and as result he still walks with us,

## THE JESUS OF ADVENTURE

and is still an incalculable influence. If there does indeed exist a God beautiful beyond all human conceiving, is it possible that this God felt a Father's pity for the stumbling, blinded race here on this tiny planet, this speck among His myriad constellations, and so mysteriously chose to enter Himself into His creation that He might forever establish for us a Pattern on which to base our growth? He would have had to incorporate Himself in some one man, of some one race and country and date. He would have had to select a means of transmission superior to the accidents of time and the limitations of place. If the Creator had actually decided thus to approach His creatures, could He have entered history with any more divine deference for our divinity than did Jesus of Nazareth?



## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION



## CHAPTER IV

**A**NY one who regards the resurrection of Jesus as a closed incident has never really believed it. The endless arguments for the validity of the resurrection curiously fail to emphasize those aspects that are perennial, for if the actuality of Jesus as a personal influence was confined to the first century then it is difficult to explain him as a living force today. Yet as I gaze at the current scene in this spring of 1929, no dead man or woman out of history seems to me so to permeate the world's affairs at this moment as does Jesus of Galilee. His presence is manifested not only by the interest in him but also by the opposition to him. Nobody is afraid of a dead man.

Twenty centuries ago a man appeared who announced a new motivating for government and church and industry. If that man were dead none of us would now be feeling our personal idealism outraged by the conduct of

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

Christian statecraft and Christian ecclesiasticism and Christian commerce. Our shame is because each one of us feels Jesus, a towering invisible figure standing there, gazing at all our varied denial of him. Perhaps he is asking whether or not he is to be crucified again. Every age has had its own ways of annulling Christ, our own way is to postpone him, yet after every death dealt to him, he has risen again in a renewed clarity. For twenty centuries the idealism uttered in Galilee has been implanted in the minds of men, fading sometimes but always presently emerging in a new power as inevitable as the coming of spring. The rejection of Jesus today shows the same elements that have always been present at his crucifixion, but in his resurrection among us there is perhaps a new and shining hope. Materialism has always been afraid of Jesus. To permit life to Jesus was for Pilate to imperil the continuance of government, for Caiaphas it was to imperil the continuance of the church, for the mob it was to imperil the continuance of the nation. One glance at any morning's paper shows that in two thousand

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

years these conceptions have not fundamentally changed. People are still in dread of Jesus because he denies the survival power of force and affirms the survival power of spirit. The new hope in Jesus' resurrection today is that there are at last some who perceive that Jesus' theory of safety may be more promising than the proved failure of the opposite theory. In the light of a world war as a fact not a dozen years in the past, sheer intelligence is now examining the theories of Jesus as perhaps the best security for the future.

It is an encouraging sign of our times that drowsy Christians are being stirred by danger. Alignments for or against Christian action for Christ's sake are becoming unavoidable. Once upon a time certain people who believed in the resurrection remade history. Others with the same belief may again remake it, but not, I fear, until the Christians of today have remade their own conviction of a risen Jesus, and become as strong and as brave as were Peter and John and Paul.

It is high time we Christians first perceived for ourselves and then shouted to the world

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

the truth that our faith rests not on any anti-quarian basis but on a living and contemporary reality. I who write these words am merely one Christian humbly trying to clarify for myself my own creed, accepting no article of it as believable until I have first proved it livable. The day has perhaps arrived when every one of us who has gone out alone to a garden hushed with dawn, and there seen a Gardener who called us by our own individual name, should cry that glad news in these modern streets, dark and sodden with sleep like the black streets of Jerusalem. So, here and now in these pages, I ask myself, Why do I believe in the resurrection of Jesus, and I answer, because of its effect in the past, its influence on the present, and its promise for the future.

An astounding effect implies an astounding cause. I gaze back through the long telescope of time, and focus on that storm-swept hill of Calvary. I see a felon hanging on his scaffold, dead. Had the man no friends? I look to right and left, but I can find not one. They have all run far away, hiding down the rabbit-

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

warren alleys of a malodorous Oriental city. There he hangs beneath the glowering sky, alone. In all Jerusalem, in all Palestine, there is not one voice to speak in his defense, yet, as every one knows, this man's only crime was that he taught and healed as being God's son, and, indeed, went even further than this in declaring that any man could become a son of God provided he obeyed the same laws of self-creation that he himself had employed. For such mad faith in man Jesus was executed, in the name of law and order and religion. What would be his fate if he should return in the flesh today? Has his ever-recurrent presence through all these centuries even yet so permeated society that Jesus of Galilee would be safe among us if once again on earth he should fearlessly teach and practise the divinity of man?

But had the outcast hanging there upon his cross no friends? Oh, many, many who followed him up and down loudly protesting their affection, followed him just to the point where following him became dangerous, then they ran away. They were at best an impulsive,

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

weak-kneed lot, the most unpromising material any reformer ever selected to promulgate his teaching. They were so thick-witted that they puzzled over their teacher's clearest words, knotted in corners whispering until he patiently explained. They were sordid, counting the money cost of the rich gifts he asked them to give. One of them was a thief. They were place-seekers, needing his pained rebuke. They were unstable, and easily depressed. They even tried to dissuade him from his steadfast purpose. No wonder that they fled to hiding when he died.

To some, I wonder, do my words sound blasphemous, for I am writing of John the beautiful, Peter the splendid, James the dauntless. I am writing of the most glorious, the most intrepid missionaries any cause has ever had. Yes, but the disciples of Jesus were only a cowardly, affectionate, shapeless lot until something happened. It is only another ghost story added to the world's collection, the resurrection of Jesus? Perhaps, but what ghost ever had the effect of producing moral grandeur in the people who thought they saw

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

him? When did a ghost drive men in an hour from abject terror to flaming, ringing courage? An astounding effect implies an astounding cause. It was something more robust than an apparition that drove cringing men to go shouting a message to audiences as derisive as ourselves, a message punished with stripes and crosses and red-jowled beasts, yet persisting, indomitable on and on down the echoing centuries until the pagan world was conquered by a handful of Jewish fishermen, and a great church raised its pinnacles to heaven to enshrine that message flung to the wind on the first Pentecost—A dead man has become alive!

We cannot too deeply ponder the circumstance that the first event of Jesus' life to be presented to the pagan world was, of all the events that might have been selected, the one most dangerous to offer, and the one most difficult to accept. If the disciples had not believed in the resurrection, the story of Jesus would have died with him. His friends would have been afraid to tell of his earth-life if they had not believed in his unearthly return.

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

The Greeks and Romans were as skeptical of the restoration of the dead as we are. And the listeners had the power of life and death over those first heralds of Christ. It may be that the most incredible tenet of all the Christian creed was the first one preached to pagan audiences because it demanded the uttermost courage in its missionaries and the uttermost faith in its converts. To make the resurrection the earliest basis of the Christian creed was to place the validity of Jesus on a surer corner stone than any documented words. Not their words but the men who spoke them were the argument for the resurrection. Those subtle, skeptic pagan crowds saw before their very eyes men risen from deadening fear to a transcendent courage. Now, as then, the evidence for the resurrection is its effect on the people who believe it. Just in so far as Christians fail to become alive, the strongest argument for the resurrection of Jesus remains unexpressed.

What was it about this Jesus of the Return that convinced his friends of his reality? Any reader must be refreshed by the tender natu-

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

ralness of the manner of Jesus' resurrection appearances. He does not frighten. He steps into people's daily life as simply and inevitably as the golden spear of a daffodil reappears in the spring from within the dooryard soil. He does not alarm or astonish. He comforts, he inspires, as always he has done. The incredible thing about the resurrection narratives is their credibility. Precisely thus, without a hair's breadth variation in personality, might Jesus have come back. But human artistry, human invention, could not have attained this perfection of detailed harmony between the Jesus of the flesh and the Jesus of the spirit. If human imagination had manufactured the resurrection, that imagination would have committed some grossness of sheer display, would not have been humble enough to make Jesus a mere gardener, a fisherman, a chance acquaintance on an afternoon's walk. To some of us who try to see him, it seems that only divinity could have conceived the utter humanity that characterizes the manner of Jesus' return from the tomb.

It was the humanity of the risen Jesus that

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

convinced his first disciples. He came in no flaming splendor such as was familiar to them in the apocalyptic literature of their day. What raised them to an unbelievable dignity was that once again he walked beside them, the same everyday friend, in the same old way urging them to courage. Human fancy could not have achieved the transcendent blend of human with divine that shines through the homely incident of a fisherman's breakfast. An all-night vigil and no reward. Tired men and hungry, men who after three years of marvelous companionship have returned to their old humdrum calling. It is dawn, cold and doubtful with mist. But there is some one on the beach, up earlier than they. Clear and cheery as ever rings a voice over the water, the voice of God speaking in human accents to his friends in the early dawn, "Ho, boys, what luck?" Then the inspiriting,

"Try again. The net on the other side this time."

A driftwood fire made ready for them by hands accustomed to humble usages. Fish crisping and pungent. Food and warmth and

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

friendly chat and the old gay-heart assurance that always came in his presence. No blaze of glory, only the homely radiance of human fellowship. And that was why they knew it was the Friend himself. And that was why Peter could go forth remade, unchanging as stone even until the death on that morning foretold. Peter the unstable recreated into rock. John, vengeful as a thunderbolt, re-created into love. Always the strongest argument for Jesus' resurrection has been its power so to transform men that the shining of their courage becomes the testimony that a risen Jesus moves beside them.

The possibilities of the present influence of Jesus' resurrection are not to be reckoned. People are turning impatiently from the Jesus of dogma to the Jesus of history. It is even true that in this swift and fluid hour, a fresh and eager public is demanding less a Jesus of history than a Jesus of experience. Reveal to us a Jesus we can live, is a cry growing constantly more articulate. There are avid readers for any account that rings true of any present-day Christian's actual experience and

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

opinion of this ever unknown Jesus. The honest, pragmatic, individual approach to Jesus characterizes his resurrection of today. At last we are becoming aware that Jesus cannot be known by looking at him, he can only be known by living him. To apply this truth to the resurrection is to release at last its long-buried power to energize.

Nothing has so long retarded the living influence of Jesus' return from death as the deadening methods used to establish it. It is the motive not the miracle of the resurrection that is the life-giving element. The mere miracle is beyond our power either to examine or to imitate, but the motive can be instantly incorporated into our conduct, and thus incorporated, it will not only enfranchise us from fear, but also reveal the deathless reality of the Galilean. Many tomes have been written, endless sermons have been spoken, in discussion of what kind of lips, what kind of hands Jesus, after death, possessed. This manner of looking at the risen Christ is moribund, medieval, evasive. So long as we examine the *how* of his return from the grave, we

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

shall never apply in our own lives the *why* of that return. Not what kind of lips, what kind of hands, but what did those lips say, what did those hands do, is the essential question. What a rekindling of resurrection faith may come to us today if we shall cease to scrutinize the miracle, but make adventure of the motive! There is no way to know Jesus except to live him. When we ourselves have bravely lifted our foreheads to the glory of God's new morning, so that we ourselves can confidently say to the grief-stricken, "Weep not," we shall know that a risen Jesus is speaking with living lips into our ear. When we ourselves have stretched toward our agnostic friends our own hands in uttermost sympathy, then we shall know beyond peradventure of doubt that Jesus, returned from death, stretched hands of love to Thomas' probing finger. The great hope for the resurrection of today lies in the fact that we are no longer peering at age-old treatises to prove that Jesus rose from the dead. We recipients of a flaming torch handed down from witness to witness through the centuries, are perceiving that

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

the living argument for the risen Christ is the living Christian.

The shining expectation for the Christian of today lies in the fact that in the gospel narrative we have first watched a man live his whole life through, unswerving from his transcendent surmise, and then have watched him come back from death utterly unscathed in character. This perception comprises the force within us of the resurrection, this is the undying element that we would prove by embodying it in our daily philosophy. In this reexamining and repenetrating the core of sacred chronicle and sacred tradition, the essential resurrection truth is becoming a power for today and a promise for tomorrow. Present and future merge swiftly in these times. No one can predict what the effect may be of the present widespread renaissance of Christian faith, but it would be perilous to deny that this mounting tide of feeling exists. It has always proved dangerous to neglect the torrential force of idealism. Statistics do not reveal spiritual upheavals. There is a strange sense of expectation all over the earth

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

today, like the hush before a dawn, palpitant with unseen, unguessed energies. Does the new interest in Jesus portend nothing? Everywhere people are asking to see him, most unlikely people, some of them. Many of these stand outside of all denominational entrances, potential worshipers whenever the church shall recognize them. These seekers demand braver action of all churches. How youth might flock to religious leadership that offered them daring and austerity, an invitation to hardship such as Jesus offered by the lakeside of Galilee! The church of today does not dream what support it would have both from within and without if it would only stand forth with a ringing call to Christian action in the name of a newly risen God. Many as are the puzzled seekers after Jesus who hesitate to enter church doors lest they miss him there, still the holiest hope of today is the fact that—scattered and lonely, yet intrepid—the bravest, clearest voices demanding a new Christianity clean of compromise, come from within the church. The church has always been the mortal channel for a divine

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

inflow, and always this mortal element has reckoned preservation and survival in terms of the old rather than of the ever new, in terms of safe doctrine rather than of adventurous living. But there are signs that the church of today is being quickened with fresh vision. Within its ranks men are seeing Jesus once again, and once again are becoming bold to live as if at his side. The splendid realism of today's attitude toward all things is showing the church that its function is to be not a casket but a conduit for the living God. Long, long ago Jesus stood ready to pour all his creative conservatism into the decaying Jewish church. It was Caiaphas who prevented this. But we have traveled twenty centuries since then. Need it happen again that Jesus be swept from the temple out toward Golgotha?

Never did the Christian church and the individual Christian have such an opportunity as in this hour. Materialism is no longer a novelty. It has endured long enough for its results both to public life and private to have become alarming. Here and there every-

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

where bewildered souls are asking for the God of ancient faith. Materialism cannot so reshape the souls of men that they can long endure without mysticism. The conception of the friendship of God, two thousand years engrafted, is not easily torn from us, or safely. Where is the God-man, whom we have so feebly followed, yet cannot do without? Amid all the noise and confusion and declared cruelty, there are voices not to be denied, and they are crying, "Give us back Jesus." It is the church's supreme opportunity, for after all, with all its human limitations, there is no other instrument to restore to groping humanity its divine and shining dream.

When we look at the seething chaos of impulses and movements before us, we Christians must feel that only a risen God beside us could make our puny band of idealists rise for a conjectured progress. It is not Christians only who perceive civilization today at a forking of the roads. Christians, however, perceive also something else. Not visionary but clear-eyed, the Christian sees standing there in the parting of the ways a towering

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

and inscrutable figure who demands, "No step further, until you answer, Who am I?" We who have humbly tried to answer that question for ourselves dare not choose the way leading back to the jungle, that road of fear.

Science today has reached a strange spot in its path, and this is acknowledged by all those sufficiently reverent before the unknown to be worthy the name of scientist. The more science has analyzed the miracles of the universe the less does their intricacy appear accidental. The noblest priests of science are now standing before a veiled altar, saying, "Behind this curtain of mystery there is Something beyond our examining." For many a year science has offered religion its example of intrepid method. The day has come for religion to offer to science religion's gift in return, saying, "Behind this curtain of mystery there is Some One who may be forever adventured."

Science is able not only to explore the wonders of the universe, it is able also to achieve wonders of its own. The supreme irony, however, is that while science can perform

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

miracles, it cannot motivate them. It is utterly helpless to supply incentive to the mass of men. It points the way to health and freedom and beauty and cannot persuade humanity to take the road to its own perfection. Instead, humanity appropriates all the genius of science, but in an atavistic funk of fear, employs it for self-destruction. The mentality of the laboratory united with the impulses of the jungle is a combination before which science itself stands aghast.

Surely if the road out of the jungle has been the road toward life, then the return is the road to suicide. Yet the world of today is frankly motived on the thought-processes of a bushman. The words of a peace pact are cynically contradicted by the repudiation of its spirit. The world would seem to be avowedly organized on a foundation of death-struggle. We are so familiar with certain expressions that we do not realize their connotation for human retrogression. Class war, race war, national war, trade war, we have become deaf to their meaning, and blind to their effect, for every one of these methods of warfare is

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

even now destroying the bodies and souls of men, injuring helpless non-combatants and preventing the fearless march of civilization. The law of the jungle is the law of retardation, the law of fear, and thus every man who is afraid of his fellow man has chosen to go through life crippled. In expecting injury from another he exhibits his own impulses. In denying divinity within his neighbor he denies it within himself.

Against all the chaos around us, the Christian has nothing to offer except his great conjecture. But the materialist also has nothing to offer but his conjecture, and for some of us his conjecture demands a far greater exercise of credulity than does the Christian's faith. To look at the triumphant climb of humanity up from the primal ooze on to the sublimity of a Jesus, and not to see back of this steadfast march any directing mentality, any pitying benevolence, is frankly beyond my power. By no uttermost effort of reasoning can I believe that Jesus of Galilee is merely a super-sublimated ape. Accounting for the existence of evil is easy, as compared with accounting

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

for the existence of good, and it is beyond human guess-work really to explain either one. But surely our beast-origin would entail beast-impulses not quickly to be mastered in a few brief æons. What an insult to our capacities if humanity had been given to the universe full grown! Creation is an incident not of time, but of eternity.

When I use the word creation I mean a slow evolutional process, to which God gave the initial impulse, whose direction He governs, and whose ultimate outcome He alone knows. Of the general trend and process of evolution we are permitted just enough understanding to enable us to assist and accelerate this process if we so desire. It is possible for us to retard the advance of God's purposeful creation, but not to stop it. That insight which enables us to guess the general tendency of evolution shows the amœba at one end of the scale and Jesus of Nazareth at the other. The space between the two is an ascending line of differentiation culminating in the myriad cellular intricacies of the human body, and the far more astounding miracles of human per-

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

sonality. To a frank common sense view the steadfast trend of evolution appears to be always up from the undifferentiated toward the individual, up from the physical toward the spiritual. Perhaps evolution might be defined as matter in process of submitting to spirit.

Creation is a process as yet only begun, but when God injected Jesus of Nazareth into human history it was the Creator's announcement to the race that He considered His creatures now fit to share in their own creation. It is my belief that ineffable God entered into the personality of Jesus, not in any so-called supernatural manner, but rather in fearless subjection to every human handicap. Bravely he risked all impediment of heredity, of family, and circumstance, of slow physical and mental and spiritual development, of misapprehension, of contumely, of failure, and of death, and after death submitted to a most precarious manner of transmission.

Just as Jesus preserved through all his suffering a character unblemished by human experience, so he gave to the history of human

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

thought a theory of conduct which, honestly tested, holds a triumphant clue to mastery of circumstance. It is my faith that the philosophy of Jesus is the only way in which a nation or an individual can ever attain its destined grandeur. By the philosophy of Jesus I mean that delicate spiritual balance by which seeing God instantly and inevitably becomes action for God, and by which action for God instantly and inevitably becomes the means for seeing God. Christ is the only Christian in whom it is impossible ever to separate vision from action. Jesus is the only man in whom contemplation and conduct have been perfectly fused. The reason why the philosophy of Jesus is still only a hesitant and abortive influence upon civilization is that both Christians and non-Christians have failed to recognize his ever-reiterated precept and his ever-repeated personal practice. Action before conviction, action as the only means to conviction, is the law of human creation revealed by Jesus. The Philip within us demands, Show us the Father, first that we may indulge in the agreeable ecstasy of gazing at

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

Him, and second that we may have absolute certainty of His help in any risk we may descend to take for Him. But Jesus held that the sole way to be sure we possess a divine Father is first to practise our brotherhood with all humanity, unremitting in our kindness toward our own family, our own community, our own nation, other nations. One break in the austerity of this practice and automatically the fatherhood of God becomes a hollow phrase and the reality of God becomes a mocking flicker.

We are criminally slow in accepting for Christian application the harsh, inviolable sequence of all scientific achievement,—hypothesis, experiment, proof. Hypothesis first, experiment second, proof third. If this is the law of all human advance, why should we suppose that God would abrogate this rule in its most important application? Why should Christian experience be exempt from God's convinced creative method? Equally in the realm of science and in the realm of religion, God, the supreme Adventurer, always challenges man to adventure his faith. So long

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

as we regard Christianity as an easy thing, a mere rapture of contemplation, or so long as we indulge ourselves in the intellectual child's play of splitting dogmas, or so long as we allow ritual to degenerate from incentive to opiate, we are permitting ourselves to revert to those moribund types of religion Jesus of Nazareth comes to annul. Jesus of Nazareth calls from sloth to daring, calls from sleep to action, from death to life. Faith to be verified only through experiment, gleaming hypothesis to be ratified only through sacrificial testing of its truth by our own conduct, this is the Creator's challenge to His creatures to help create themselves.

While I conceive God as having other attributes than fatherhood, I believe that fatherhood is the most stimulating aspect under which we can view Him, and that it was with creative intention that in the character of Jesus He concentrated our thoughts on this aspect. I believe that two thousand years ago, the Creator appeared among us in human shape with the divine motive of giving us an example on which to pattern our growth.

## THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

Jesus is himself the supreme example of hypothesis subjected to the risk of experiment. Believing himself the son of God, he put his sonship to the test by living in accordance with this heredity. Did he or did he not establish the proof? Believing himself superior to death, he put this conviction to the test by living his brief mortal years with the large gesture of immortality. Does, or does not, his subsequent history establish the proof? To those two questions the reply is yes, for those who dare to practise their own kinship with a Father conjectured as divine, and their own friendship with a Jesus conjectured as deathless.

Who is Jesus? The answer is the boldest hypothesis human imagination has ever conceived. It is time perhaps for each Christian to declare the resurrection faith within him. For myself I believe Jesus to be the Creator in human shape because of his inexplicable power to create personality in his associates. Any one who dares to make even the feeblest attempt to test Jesus' philosophy of conduct feels an expansion within himself, a myste-

THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION

rious sense of enfranchisement. One curious fact about Jesus is that he does not appear to have possessed this creative faculty at its full power until after his earthly death. There is something stranger than fiction in the persistence of Jesus, something no materialism can explain in the sober fact that the conviction a man long ago dead is shining at one in the light of one's commonplace window, is the most energizing influence to be felt in life. If that Presence, so robust and vitalizing, were a lie, why should its influence not be enervating like any other form of hallucination? And yet, as every one of his adventurers knows, this Presence beside us is relentless. Of mere contemplation Jesus is ironically scornful. His face grows dimmer if we disobey by so much as a thought the clear commands in his eyes. But very patient he is with us, too, often reassuringly humorous in his tenderness, for he knows we must make mistakes, conditioned as we are to apprehend his guidance only through the mechanism of a blind human brain, and the clogged response of fumbling nerves. There is one thing only for which he

THE JESUS OF THE RESURRECTION sternly holds us responsible, and that is adventure—ever on though we stumble and faint and question. All he demands is that, despite our human clumsiness, we preserve our faith in the creative power of his presence to make us our bravest selves.

Thus stands today my appraisement of Jesus so far as I can make it articulate for myself. Who knows what ramifications these still incomplete conclusions may take, what glimpsing vistas they may flash upon the commonplace! One's knowledge of a friend is never finished, the revelation of a living man is never completed. Jesus will never be completed. The deepest conviction of my faith is that the life of Jesus upon earth is hardly as yet begun, for I believe Jesus the Son of God not because of his manner of entering the world, but because of his manner of remaining in it.

THE END











Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01028 5171